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Jacksonville District

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS MOVES FORWARD WITH DEVELOPMENT OF NEW LAKE OKEECHOBEE REGULATION SCHEDULE STUDY

Jacksonville District to seek public comment on draft plan

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Jacksonville District announced today that it will proceed with the next steps to develop a new regulation schedule for Lake Okeechobee. A draft report detailing the proposed new schedule, which is described as the tentatively selected plan (TSP), is being readied for release and public review.

The Lake Okeechobee Regulation Schedule Study (LORSS) was initiated in 2006 after repeated high rainfall periods demonstrated that the existing regulation schedule, the Water Supply Environment Schedule (WSE), was not well-suited to address persistent high lake water levels, such as those occurring during the busy storm seasons of 2004 and 2005. Long periods of high water levels in the lake were harmful to the overall health of Lake Okeechobee. Also, the Corps and State identified seepage issues during high water conditions, which could lead to failure of the aging Herbert Hoover Dike (HHD) and result in flooding of surrounding communities and farm lands. A major rehabilitation project to strengthen the HHD is already under way, but it will take many years to repair the 144-mile long structure.

“The WSE did not give us the flexibility to make the right management decisions when water levels were too high,” said Col. Paul Grosskruger, commander of the Jacksonville District. “To achieve lower lake water levels, we had to regularly deviate from the approved WSE schedule. The decision paths provided in a new, approved regulation schedule should enable us to make decisions to better manage water levels in and discharges from the lake. That is why we decided to develop a new schedule. The South Florida Water Management District, a valued member of our team, joined with us to develop a new operating schedule.”

Because Lake Okeechobee is the center of the water storage infrastructure for south Florida, ideas about managing the lake vary greatly. Therefore, the process used to develop the new regulation schedule included coordination with hundreds of people and a diverse group of stakeholders.

In addition to protecting the health and safety of those living near the dike, another important consideration in developing the new schedule was the protection of the sensitive St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries. Alternative plans to maintain lower levels in the lake were carefully examined to minimize the effects of the lake discharges to those water bodies.

“Balancing the need for lower lake levels with maintaining precious water supplies proved a challenging task, but with this release for public review of the LORSS tentatively selected plan, stakeholders will be



able to decide if the study goals have been addressed,” said Grosskruger. “The TSP will increase the safety of residents, while benefiting the lake, the estuaries and areas of the Everglades located south of the lake.”

The new Lake Okeechobee regulation schedule is an interim fix while the dike is repaired and as other components of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP) are put into place. The draft tentatively selected plan will be available for review and a 45-day public comment period beginning in early July. For those who would like to learn more, the Corps will present the TSP and gather public comment in a series of four meetings soon after release of the plan. Please watch our website, www.saj.usace.army.mil, for notification of draft plan release and details on the public meetings.

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